

LOGIC SEEN IN THE *DIAMOND SUTRA*

In essence, the expression "A is *a*-A (non-A), therefore, it is called A" repeatedly appears in the *Diamond Sutra* (*Vajracchedikā*). It is well known that Daisetsu Suzuki argued that such an expression was governed by an unconventional logic, and named it "the logic of *Sokuhi* (Logic of Identity and Mutual Negation)". Daisetsu was of the opinion that Buddhism entailed a special way of thinking that did not accord to or deviate from the basic principles of the formal logic, and that such a specialty constituted an important part of Buddhism. This theory has been supported by the academic world to some extent.

However, it remains controversial whether or not this expression really represents a betrayal of the basic principles of the formal logic, as Daisetsu concluded. It seems that Daisetsu's theory is open to discussion, and I believe that Daisetsu wrongly interpreted the meaning of the negative prefix, "*a*-". In my opinion, the arguments given in the *Diamond Sutra* is inherently consistent with the basic principles of the formal logic, and I am at least certain that paradoxes not always underlie the nature of Buddhism.

It is true that the *Diamond Sutra* contains several descriptions written in the form that "A is non-A", as typically represented by the following example.

Example 1: *Prajñāpāramitā* (Perfection of Wisdom) that the Tathāgata has taught is non-*prajñāpāramitā*. Thus it is called *prajñāpāramitā*¹.

1. E. CONZE, *Vajracchedika Prajnaparamita*, Roma, 1974, pp. 37-38: *yaiva*

As far as the expressive form is concerned, a compound word that contains the negative prefix “a- (non)” (a-A) can be interpreted to indicate the “being which is not A”, as shown in the Example 1. It should be noted, however, that while the negative prefix “a-” can mean the “being which is not xxx”, it can also indicate “xxx which is non-existent” as in the case of the *Middle Stanzas* (*Madhyamakārikā*). For Example 1, the latter case should apply. Therefore, “*prajñāpāramitā* ... is non-*prajñāpāramitā*” is an incorrect translation of the original sentence.

If the domain of discourse encompasses “the whole” and “non-A” indicates a complementary set of A, the proposition that “A is non-A” can be interpreted to mean “if x belongs to A, x belongs to non-A”, and if this really is what is meant by the *Diamond Sutra*, we may say this sutra is indeed governed by a logic incompatible with or indifferent to the basic principles of formal logic, as Daisetsu indicated. In line with this thinking, the proposition of the *Diamond Sutra* in question could be interpreted to mean; “*prajñāpāramitā* is all the beings existent in the world (the whole) excluding *prajñāpāramitā*; consequently, it can be dogs, marbles, flowers, etc.”. However, it is hard to believe this is the philosophy of the *Diamond Sutra*. Therefore, it is necessary to try to interpret this description in another way.

There are about 30 such seemingly paradoxical expressions in the *Diamond Sutra*, though this number can vary somewhat depending on whether some ambiguous descriptions are counted or not. All these descriptions contain a compound word with the negative prefix “a-”, and negation is expressed by this prefix “a-”, not by “na”, a negative word used to deny the entire proposition.

When we use the expression “non-A” we generally assume that the domain of discourse is the “entire universe”. However, this does not apply to the compound words containing the negative prefix “a-” that appear in the *Diamond Sutra*. To be specific, in the case of the Example 1, which is shown above, the domain of discourse is not the entire universe, but *prajñāpāramitā*. Because of this, the negative pre-

Subhūte prajñāpāramitā Tathāgatena bhāṣitā saiva-a-prajñāpāramitā Tathāgatena bhāṣitā. tenocyate prajñāpāramiteti. Cf. M. MÜLLER, *Vajracchedikā-Prajñāpāramitā-Sūtra*, Oxford, 1881, pp. 28-29.

fix "a-" cannot mean the complementary set of *prajñāpāramitā*; rather, it can be interpreted to indicate the style or phase of *prajñāpāramitā* as discussed in the domain of discourse of *prajñāpāramitā*. In fact, Example 2, as shown below, supports this assumption.

Example 2: Existent notion (*bhūta-saṃjñā*) is non-existent notion (*a-bhūta-saṃjñā*). Therefore the Tathāgata teaches, "existent notion, existent notion"².

The Chinese translation (translated by Kumārajīva) of this part reads: This real notion is non-[existent] notion. Therefore, the Tathāgata names it real notion"³. In Kumārajīva's translation, the word "*bhūta*" is translated into "real", and "*a-bhūta*" into mere "non-", which should have been "non-real or unreal". The negative prefix "a-" of "*a-bhūta*" denies "*bhūta*", not "*bhūta-saṃjñā*". Also, the word "*bhūta*" is a determiner that means "existent" and modifies "notion". This word in no way defines what the "real" notion indicates. Thus "*a-bhūta*" seen in Example 2 should be interpreted to mean "non-existent (being)". The Tibetan translation of "*a-bhūta-saṃjñā*" is "*'du ses ma mchis pa*", meaning "non-existent notion"⁴. In a Central Asian manuscript the text reads "*asaṃjñā*"⁵, which Prof. Nakamura and Prof. Kino have translated into "absence of notion"⁶. Furthermore, Kumārajīva translated the word "*a-saṃjñā*" into "non-notion", as shown in Example 3 below⁷.

Though Example 3 does not contain the phrase "Thus it is called xxx", this description is closely associated with the discussion of this subject matter.

2. [CONZE 1974: 39]: *yā caiṣā Bhagavan bhūta-saṃjñā saiva-abhūta-saṃjñā. tasmāt Tathāgato bhāṣate bhūta-saṃjñā bhūta-saṃjñeti*. Cf. MULLER, p. 30.

3. *Taisho Tripitaka*, vol. VIII, p. 750b.

4. *The Tibetan Tripitaka*, Peking Edition, Suzuki Research Foundation, vol. XXI (1956), p. 253, f. 2, ll. 4-5.

5. F. E. PARGITER, "Vajracchedikā", in A. F. R. HOERNLE, *Manuscript Remains of Buddhist Literature Found in Eastern Turkestan*, 1916, p. 188: *Yaiṣā Bhagavaṇi bhūta-saṃjñā saivāsaṃjñā*.

6. H. NAKAMURA and K. KINO, *Hannyashingyou Kongouhannyakyou (The Heart Sutra and the Diamond Sutra)*, Tokyo, 1960, p. 144.

7. *Taisho Tripitaka*, vol. VIII, p. 749b.

Example 3: In these Bodhisattvas, no *dharma*-notion (*dharma-saṃjñā*) takes place. Similarly, no non-*dharma*-notion (*a-dharma-saṃjñā*) takes place. And, Subhūti, no notion (*saṃjñā*) or non-(existent)-notion (*a-saṃjñā*) takes place in them ⁸.

"*Dharma-saṃjñā*" means a notion about the components of the world (*dharma*). On the other hand, "*a-dharma-saṃjñā*" does not refer to all of the beings in the world (the universe) excluding *dharma-saṃjñā*, nor that notion about beings that do not comply with the things (*a-dharma*). The negative prefix "*a-*" in this case means "non-existent (being)" as it does in Examples 1 and 2. Otherwise, we may say that in Example 3, *dharma* is divided into the categories of existent beings and non-existent beings, each category complementing the other.

Thus, the first half of Example 3 can read "Bodhisattvas have no notion about existent things, or no notion about non-existent things. Therefore they have no notion about any things". In fact, the *Middle Stanzas* often develops arguments in a manner that divides a domain (D) of *x* into A and non-A so that the sum of A and non-A constitutes entire D, and concludes that *x* cannot be found in either parts of the domain. Incidentally, no proposition is presented in the form that "A is *a-A*. Thus it is called A" in the *Middle Stanzas*.

A similar way of thinking can be applied to the interpretation of "*saṃjñā* (notion)" and "*a-saṃjñā* (non-notion)" that appear in the latter half of Example 3. In this case, we may reasonably conclude that *saṃjñā* means existent notion, and *a-saṃjñā* means non-existent notion, which undoubtedly corresponds, respectively, to *bhūta-saṃjñā* and *a-bhūta-saṃjñā* as seen in Example 2.

Below is Example 4, which contains the same kind of proposition as Example 3, and represents the same paradoxical reasoning typical of the *Diamond Sutra* as shown in Examples 1 and 2.

Example 4: Own-being (*ātma-bhāva*) is neither being (*bhāva*) nor non-being (*a-bhāva*). So it is called own-being ⁹.

8. CONZE, p. 31: *na-api teṣāṃ Subhūte bodhisattvānāṃ mahāsattvānāṃ dharma-saṃjñā pravartate, evaṃ na-adharma-saṃjñā. na-api teṣāṃ Subhūte saṃjñā na-asamjñā pravartate. Cf. MÜLLER, p. 23.*

9. CONZE, p. 36: *na hi Bhagavan sa bhāvo na-abhāvaḥ (tenocyate ātma-bhāva iti). Cf. MÜLLER, p. 27.*

In this case, the proposition is expressed in the form that "D is neither A nor non-A. Therefore it is called D", and the sum of A and non-A (in other words, the domain of being and that of non-being) constitutes the "whole". Therefore, Example 4 can be interpreted to mean; "because own-being (*ātma-bhāva*) belongs to nothing, it is non-existent. Therefore, it is called own-being". Giving a name to a being that is not existent and creating a world of "a collection of signs" is a practice typical of the Philosophy of Emptiness. It should be noted that Example 4 does not explicitly state that "own-being is non-own-being. So it is called own-being". However, this is exactly what is meant by Example 4, as the sentence that "own-being is neither being (*bhāva*) nor non-being (*a-bhāva*)" means, in effect, that "own-being is non-being (= non-existent)". Following this line of thinking, we may conclude that the paradoxical arguments typically seen in the *Diamond Sutra* can be interpreted to indicate that "A is non-A. Therefore it is called A", which, at the same time, means "A is non-existent. Therefore it is called A". In fact, such expression often appears in the *Diamond Sutra*, as shown in Example 5 below.

Example 5: There is no such being as *Arhat*. That is why he is called an *Arhat* ¹⁰.

The proposition in this example is presented in the form that "A is non-existent. So it is called A". This means, a being (*x*) is perceived as A in the daily dimension where words prevail, but *x* is non-existent in the ultimate sense, or in the sphere of Emptiness. Emptiness is not equal to nothingness in which no action takes place. The *Diamond Sutra* and the *Middle Stanzas* hold that words and actions can occur precisely because the being (*x*) is non-existent; in the Philosophy of Emptiness, an "existent being" is a "rigid being" that does not allow changes or interactions with others, and thus has no room for action. Thus, *x* is worded as "A", for it is non-existent.

The above discussion leads us to a conclusion that the paradoxical expression that "A is non-A. Therefore it is called A" that repeat-

10. CONZE, p. 35: *na hi sa Bhagavan kaścīd dharma yo 'rhan nāma. tenocyate 'rhan nāma*. Cf. MÜLLER, p. 26.

edly appears in the *Diamond Sutra* means "A is non-existent. Therefore, it is worded as A". The domain of discourse of the proposition "A is non-A" is not the whole, but A. Therefore, the phrase "A is non-A" should be interpreted to mean that "the being that is considered to exist in the name of A is in reality non-existent", not that "A is all the things other than A". In line with this argument, we have no reason to assume that an unconventional logic governs the *Diamond Sutra*.

Yet there remains one point to be considered. The expressions of the form "A is non-A" seen in the *Diamond Sutra* might refer to the very moment in which the wisdom of *prajñāpāramitā* is obtained. Daisetsu seems to intend to mean that the mental state at the very moment of obtaining the wisdom of *prajñāpāramitā* is beyond logic, and that a paradox such as "A is non-A" is the only possible way to explain the content of the wisdom. Nonetheless, it seems to me that the expression "A is non-A" in the *Diamond Sutra* is not a logical paradox but a rhetorical way of saying.